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Dowry and brideprice

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dowry and brideprice The two types of marital endowments in Eurasian societies, given or promised at marriage, to cover the expenses of the common household and to secure the widow's livelihood. The dowry, furnished by the bride's family, was the prevalent type in Greece, Italy, and Egypt to the 4th cent. The brideprice (or bridegift, indirect dowry), contributed by the groom's family, appears in Roman sources in the 3rd cent., possibly reflecting various provincial usages. Its value increased esp. in the 5th cent., the brideprice being often included in the dowry. Justinian decreed that the dowry and brideprice should be equal, but local differences may have survived. In the post-Roman west, except perhaps Italy, brideprice totally superseded the dowry. The underlying reasons for these developments are unknown, although the new system harmonized with Germanic practice, which knew diverse kinds of endowment only from the groom. In Persia, both families contributed assets to the new household. For Arabic marriage, brideprice was an essential constituent, part of it going to the bride and part to her father. She might also receive property from her natal family, but there was probably regional and social variation. The influence of Islamic teaching on traditional custom remains controversial.

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L. Anné, *Les Rites des fiançailles et la donation pour cause de mariage dans le Bas-Empire* (1941).

Arjava *Women* 52–75.

J. Goody, *The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive: Systems of marriage and the family in the pre-industrial societies of Eurasia* (1990).

Kaser *Privatrecht* 2.185–201.

250 words

Abbreviations used not in current list:

Arjava *Women* = A. Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (1996).

Kaser *Privatrecht* = M. Kaser, *Das römische Privatrecht*, 2 vols. (²1972–5).

Possible cross references:

Justinian

marriage